

The

Ballarat

Naturalist

February 2009



EXCURSION – BUNGAL STATE FOREST

LEADERS: PAUL NORQUAY & ELSPETH SWAN

Nineteen members arrived at Lal Lal Falls carpark mid-morning and headed to the concrete causeway upstream of the Falls. On the other side is a fenced-off area where Anchor Plants grow (A Bicentennial project of FNCB - refer excursion notes in *The Ballarat Naturalist* Feb 2005). We estimated that there were in excess of 30 plants thriving – they had flowered and were setting seed. White-faced Heron, White-necked Heron, Black Duck and eight ducklings, an Ibis and Kestrels were observed. In the sward here were Serrated Tussock, Poa Grass, Spear Grass and Wallaby Grass. Also at this location native Raspberry, native Ranunculus and native Woodruff. Paul showed us how to identify the noxious Serrated Tussock with its rough stem and explained how it could kill livestock through lack of nourishment.

Heading in the other direction to a vantage point for observing Lal Lal Falls themselves (no water flowing over today) only a pool at the base of the Falls remained until Lal Lal Creek (on which the Falls are situated), flows again. We noted all the willows down stream had shrivelled up. Later on, on making enquiries from one Alan May of Moorabool Shire, I was able to ascertain that this shire had obtained funding from Corangamite CMA for a contractor to stem inject these trees with poison (the degradable *Roundup*) 4-5 years ago. Today we have the valley almost pristine again.

We stopped at Heatherbell Road turn-off. In the Lal Lal Bungal Historic Area Little Grass Trees grew prolifically. Then it was along Andersons Road to the Egerton/Elaine-Mt. Doran Road intersection. After Hunts's Bridge the

next stop was Lal Lal Reservoir (Bungal Dam) situated on the West Moorabool River. When this dam was first installed it filled quickly in years of abundant rainfall. But now in time of drought it is well down. Upon making enquiries at the Central Highlands Water office I discovered that the reservoir is at 5.8% capacity. Bird life still thrives – Superb Fairy Wrens (heard), Mountain Duck (Shelduck), Black Cormorant, Crested Grebe, Magpie, Willie Wagtail were seen. On our way to Bungal Dam along Mt Egerton Rd a Brown Falcon was seen in a tree.



Elspeth, Paul and Les discuss identification. (*Photo: Carol Hall*)

Along Egan's Road Wood Duck and Black Swans were observed on a dam. We then drove along Condie's Lane, entering the Bungul State Forest (Whipstick Scrub). We made note of the following plant species: Common Wedge-pea, Blue Pincushion, Slender Speedwell, Groundsel, Common Flat-pea, Common Button Everlasting.

Next we arrived at the currently disused Mt. Egerton Recreation Reserve and shortly after crossed to Mt. Egerton Cemetery mid-afternoon where Beard-heath, Red-Anthered Wallaby Grass, Silvertop Wallaby Grass, Black-anther Flax Lily, Clustered Everlastings and one of the Vanilla Lily species grew. There was evidence of rabbits.

We all partook of Paul and Elspeth's hospitality at their home in Yendon Road to conclude this excursion. The weather, cloudy and a bit cold in the morning, cleared to a sunny day.

Tony Johns.

ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FLOW IN BURRUMBEET CREEK.

My views about the future flow of the Burrumbeet Creek are formed from the point of view of protecting the ecology of the creek and to a lesser extent Lake Burrumbeet. It is desirable to maintain the ecology of the creek at least at its present level. My ideal creek may differ in some ways from the farmers point of view. However water is necessary in the creek both for the viability of the environment and the agricultural and domestic users along the creek.

At present the flora and fauna along the creek are doing reasonably well considering the past decade of below average rainfall. Evidence of this is the bird population that has been maintained along the creek and in Lake Burrumbeet. Many of the birds are migratory and only arrive and stay at the lake while conditions are suitable. Migratory waders – (Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint, breed in northern hemisphere) have been present over summer and autumn. Duck, Swan, Tern and Stilt numbers vary widely with season and the amount of water in the Lake. Platypus are still seen along various sections of the creek, indicating that their invertebrate food organisms are present.

Historically the flow along the creek would have varied with periods of no flow but pools of water would have remained as refuges for fish, platypus and many invertebrate animals that make up the lower levels of the food chain.

Without water from the treatment plant and storm water from urban areas, flow during summer would have been very low. Dams in the headwaters of the creek have had a negative effect on flows. What is the net effect of the Macarthur Park subdivision and wetland on the creek flow? The diversion of storm water and treated sewage effluent has a severe effect on summer flows. Reduction of summer flow combined with seepage, evaporation and stock and domestic consumption of water along the creek will severely affect the ecology of the creek. The ideal creek must have sufficient flow to maintain pools of water throughout the year.

Streamside fencing, underway along sections of the creek, is as important as maintaining adequate water flow, to protect the water quality and environmental values of the creek and in turn Lake Burrumbeet. Natural vegetation protects banks from erosion, minimises movement of silt and nutrients into the creek, provides habitat for fauna and increases the biodiversity of the stream and streamside.

John Gregurke

ASPECTS OF NATURAL HISTORY OF MALAWI

DR FRAN HANRAHAN

Fran worked as a lecturer at Mzuzu University in Malawi during 2006 and 2007, living at the university campus. Mzuzu is in the tropics about level with Darwin so typical daily temperatures were in the 30s. Fran spoke on the natural history of the area having travelled to some of the more pleasant natural areas of the country whilst acknowledging there are less attractive aspects.

With an area of about 72,000 square km, about one third the size of Victoria, Malawi is one of Africa's smaller countries. Lake Malawi which is about 600km long and 80 km wide occupies about 20% of the area of the country. The freshwater lake is up to 700m deep. The country is landlocked in southeast Africa. It was formerly called Nyasaland and is bordered by Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania. The population is about 12 million. In 1861 the area was visited by David Livingstone who met with chiefs to try to stop slave trading.

Malawi has nine national parks plus reserves and sanctuaries. Fran visited, spoke about and showed photographs of a number of these.

Mt Mulanje Forest Park has a massif, one rock about 20 by 30 km.

Nyika National Park is a northern plateau with an area of 2,000 square km. The plateau is between 2,100 and 2,600m and the temperature can get down to -6C in a country that has typical daytime temperatures in the 30s. The plateau has open grassland with kangaroo grasses except that they are called elephant grass. There are plenty of waterfalls.

Other parks which Fran mentioned were Vwaza which is a marsh area, Liwonde National Park – a riverland on the Shire River where elephants can be seen. The Zomba plateau, which looks down on the city of Zomba, is a forest area where people go to keep cool. The Lilongwe Sanctuary is located in the capital. Fran showed photos of hippos munching on the grass and in the water.

Plants in Malawi include eucalypt forests, pines, proteas and delphiniums. There are the remains of acacias which have been cut down and used for tan bark. There are numerous tea plantations and tobacco crops. The main crop is maize with every square inch of people's gardens being planted with it. People on the roadside sell potatoes. What we call sweet potatoes are just called potatoes while the things we call potatoes are referred to as Irish potatoes. Trees grew very well. Fran showed photos of eucalypts she planted near her home which grew to twice the height of the house in 18 months. She also related an interesting story involving a pied crow. Her house key had a piece of blue plastic tied to it when, to save carrying it, she buried it. On return she noticed some rubbish and being a good citizen decided to pick it up only to find her key attached. Seems a pied crow had seen the blue plastic and dug it up but didn't carry it far. Next time the key was completely buried and the spot marked with a lid. This time on return the key was completely missing but fortunately a search of the area located a collection of blue things which included the key. Seems satin bower birds are not the only ones to make collections.

Birds seen included African jacana, African wood owl, bee eater (Les says numerous), starling, canary, cape gannets, cordon blue bird, giant kingfisher (bit smaller than kookaburra), and guinea fowl.

Mzuzu University where Fran worked was a walled area. Resources were limited. Library books were in English which was difficult for some students and desks were in short supply. Students who secured one would carry it around with them all day.

Thank you Fran for giving us a glimpse of the two years you gave to enrich the lives of these people and for showing us your photographs of natural history which is quite different from our own.

Peter Dalman



THE HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATURAL HISTORY MEDALLION

On 24th March 1939, J. K. Moir wrote to the Secretary of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, suggesting the establishment of an award as recognition and "appreciation of some person's signal service" towards protecting native flora and fauna.

John Kinmont Moir, who was quaintly described as a private member of the F.N.C.V., was also the president and moving spirit of the Bread and Cheese Club which had been founded the previous year, with the aim of drawing together people who were concerned with fostering knowledge of the Australian arts and cultivating "an Australian sentiment" and assisting them in practical ways to achieve these objectives. The suggestion was favourably received by the F.N.C.V. and a meeting was held on 1st May 1939 attended by the President (R. H. Croll), Vice-President (AS. Chalk) and Secretary (F. S. Colliver) and J.K. Moir, to discuss the details of the proposal. It was agreed that the committee should consist of two representatives from each club or society. J. E. Moir had originally written to several clubs, including the Gould League, the F.N.C.V., the R.A.O.U., the Mitcham Field Naturalists' Club, the Wattle League, the Bread and Cheese Club, and the Bird Observers' Club, though he requested the F.N.C.V. to take the initiative in getting the matter going. Letters were sent out to a further ten organisations, and a committee meeting to draw up the rules governing the award was held on 5th June.

Although some modifications and amendments have become necessary since then, the rules drawn up on that occasion remain essentially the same today. Rule 6 read: Any person is eligible for the Award who it can be shown has increased popular or scientific knowledge of Australian Flora and Fauna, including Man, or has assisted notably in the protection or propagation of Flora and Fauna, or has discovered new species of importance, or has devoted much time to the study of the subject, or has done definite service by the publication of articles or books or by photography by pictorial art, or by any other means.

From "The History of the Australian Natural History Medallion" by Sheila Houghton. Field Naturalists Club of Victoria. 1987 (FNCV website <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fncv/history.htm>)



You will notice the use of the new club logo on page 1. We thank **David Hocking** very much for the work he did in modifying the cloth badge to create the new digital logo.

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Incorporated
No. A0014919P ABN 13 150 403 135

Minutes of the General Meeting

5th December 2008.

Opening and Apologies.

The President, Peter Dalman, opened the meeting and welcomed 23 members and visitors. Apologies were received from Nina Netherway, Zelda Martin, Elspeth Swan, Paul Norquay, Eileen Anderson, Margaret Martin.

The apologies were accepted on the motion of Fran Hanrahan, seconded Peter Billing.

Minutes of previous meeting were summarised in the Ballarat Naturalist and tabled.

Accepted on the motion of Elizabeth Thurgood, seconded: Fran Hanrahan.

Correspondence.

IN:

- Field Naturalists Club of Victoria: Field Nats News, November & December 2008.
- Geelong FNC: Geelong Naturalist, October, November & December 2008.
- Bendigo FNC: Whirrakee, November 2008.
- Castlemaine FNC: Castlemaine Naturalist, November 2008.
- Birds Australia: Newsletter of Threatened Bird Network and Atlas of Austn Birds, October 2008.
- Royal Botanic Gardens: Floreo, Spring 2008.
- DSE: Weed Spotter Newsletter; North-west district fire operations plan.
- Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria: Public Liability Insurance invoice; Gardeners Gazette, Summer 08/09.
- Threatened Species Network: TSN News, Summer 2008.
- City of Ballarat: Australia Day 2009 awards; Canadian Valley Outline Development Plan.
- DSE: VEAC River Red Gum Forests investigation; Bendigo FMA Forest Management Plan.
- Corangamite CMA: Annual Report 2007/08.
- Patricia Liffman: Membership.
- Trust for Nature: Bush Protection Program Renewal, \$50.
- Enfield Forest Alliance: Receipt for membership - \$10.
- Australian Natural History Medallion: Ern Perkins has been awarded 2008 ANHM.
- Bendigo Bank: Statement.
- Victorian National Parks Association: Appeal and Bush heritage Australia: Appeal.
- Regent Honeyeater Recovery Effort: Where the Regents Roam, October 2008.
- Spirit of Tasmania: Tourist information.
- CSIRO Publishing: Catalogue.
- John and Alison Willams

OUT:

- Ern Perkins: email congratulating Ern on award of 2008 Australian Natural History Medallion.
- Christie Family: Sympathy card on death of Maureen.

Moved: Carol Hall; Seconded: Denis Thurgood. Carried.

Reports

Treasurer's Report: Opening Balance: \$4477.16; Income: \$140.60; Expenses: \$163.65; Closing Balance: \$4454.11. Moved: Les Hanrahan; Seconded: John Morrish. Carried.

Wattles of Ballarat: Photography of all the species is now complete. *A. mearnsii* was photographed at Haddon at the end of November.

General Business

- Phone call from Ian Magee, Bendigo Environment Group. Working on campaign to protect the remnant forest areas of Mt Cole, Mt Lonarch and Pyrenees. Organising a Forest day on Sunday 1 March 2009 at Richards Campground. Folk Music, speakers from ACF, VNPA, Parks Vic and Tourism, bushwalks.
- *Wildflowers of the Brisbane Ranges*: Elizabeth Thurgood offered to organise a bulk purchase of the book for those interested.
- David Hocking has modified the Trailing Goodenia club logo to prepare a digital copy. Six variations with different letter and border colours were presented.
- That the club adopt the logo of the Trailing Goodenia with green lettering and border as the digital logo of Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat. Moved Greg Binns, Seconded Claire Dalman. Carried.
- That thanks be conveyed to David Hocking for the work done in preparing and modifying the digital logo of Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat. Moved Claire Dalman. Seconded Ken Hammond. Carried.

Show and Tell

Carol Hall showed a book of the work of a group of Western Australian botanic artists. She also had an album of photographs of her recent Scandinavian trip.

Field Reports

- Denis and Elizabeth Thurgood: Three clutches of Wood Duck being raised around a dam on they property at Beaufort. The largest clutch contained 17 ducklings but has been reduced to 13 (other clutches 5 and 6). Parents are alert with heads up while the young are feeding.
- Carol Hall: Clutches of 17 and 15 Wood Ducks seen at Haddon.
- Ken Hammond: 2 Crested Pigeon corner Dowling and Cambridge Streets, Wendouree.
- Claire Dalman: Many hundreds of Straw-necked Ibis in paddocks around Miners Rest.
- Helen Burgess: Bronze-wing Pigeon at Ballarat North.
- John Gregurke: 1adult and 1 juvenile Peregrine Falcon seen flying and feeding at Devil's Kitchen only 19 days after 3 fluffy chicks were seen in the nest. (Carol Hall reported that the recent BOCA camp, late Nov, saw the two adults and 3 juveniles.)

Excursion Arrangements:

Sunday 7 December to Bungal Forest. Leaders: Elspeth Swan and Paul Norquay. During the excursion a bird list will be compiled and sent to Ballarat BOCA for Bird Challenge.

Saturday 6 December 8.30am, to Creswick District for BOCA Bird Challenge. Ken Hammond, John Gregurke, Greg Binns & Peter Dalman.

Thursday 11 December to Western Treatment Plant, Werribee.

Syllabus Item: Fran Hanrahan: "Aspects of the Natural History of Malawi". Fran had spent two years lecturing a university in Malawi. Her talk explained many of her impressions of the natural history of the lakes, mountains and urban areas which she had visited. Peter Dalman thanked Fran and presented her with a gift.

Supper

CALENDAR 2009

February

- Friday 6 *Nature Photography* - Tony Wilson, Chairman, BEN
Sunday 8 **Excursion:** Water holes around Creswick - Greg Binns
Tuesday 24 Committee meeting at Fran Hanrahan's, 10A Ferguson Crt

March

- Sunday 1 Brolga Workshop at Mooramong. 10am, No Charge, BYO Lunch
Friday 6 **AGM and Members Images** - Members are invited to bring along up to 12 slides, photos or digital images on the theme *The Tree as Ecosystem*.
Sunday 8 **Excursion:** Blackwood - Leader, Dr Fran Hanrahan
Wed 11 **Australian Natural History Medallion 2008** Presentation to Ern Perkins at FNCV Hall, 1 Gardenia St, Blackburn. Buffet meal 6.30pm - \$15. (RSVP fncv@vicnet.net.au by 2 March) If you wish to attend the 8pm presentation only, booking is not necessary. Ern will speak on *The Changing Forest*.
Friday 20 Monday 23 **SEANA Autumn Camp** at Port Fairy hosted by Warrnambool FNC.

Committee

President Mr Peter Dalman
Vice-President Mr Greg Binns
Secretary Mr John Gregurke
Treasurer Mr Les Hanrahan

Miss Helen Burgess.....	Mrs Claire Dalman
Mrs Carol Hall	Mrs Val Hocking.....
Mr John Morrish	Dr Frances Hanrahan.....
Ms Nina Netherway (editor).....	

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Website: www.ballarat.yourguide.com.au Click on *Local Info. Search Environment*

Meetings are held at Ballarat Horticultural Centre, cnr. Gregory & Gillies Sts (VicRoads 254 F8) on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm.

Excursions: Depart from Ballarat Horticultural Centre, cnr. Gregory & Gillies Sts (VicRoads 254 F8) at 9.30am unless otherwise specified.

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